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### Stuck Together While Staying 6 Feet Apart: Exploring COVID-19's Impact on Domestic Violence

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Stuck Together While Staying 6 Feet Apart: Exploring COVID-19's Impact on Domestic  
Violence

Janelle Havens

Merrimack College

## INTRODUCTION

According to many domestic violence and women's organizations, the incidences of domestic violence have increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the consequence of lockdowns, social distancing, and closures of all non-essential businesses. While these are all safety measures designed to help stop the spread of COVID-19, domestic violence has increased since these have been implemented. Families are confined to one household for weeks or even months during these lockdown periods, meanwhile they're experiencing employment loss, financial strain, unstable housing, and new caregiver responsibilities. All of these factors contribute to a more hostile environment for all members of the family. In this research, I use data collected from an online survey I conducted, publicly available datasets, and analysis of other relevant empirical research. The results will show that there is a spike in domestic violence incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic, however it is difficult to determine just what specifically creates an environment that will result in domestic violence.

Keywords: COVID-19, domestic violence, lockdown, intimate partner violence, child maltreatment

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed Americans' lives in significantly negative ways. With the unpredictability of the pandemic, many people are experiencing job loss, financial strain, isolation, mental health problems, and substance abuse, to name a few. These negative experiences compound and create further problems from within the home in the form of domestic violence. Domestic violence is defined as "acts of violence or abuse against a person living in one's household, especially a member of one's immediate family" (Dictionary.com 2020), and encompasses violence towards intimate partners, children, and the elderly. New and developing research surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has shown evidence that with the implementation of lockdown orders, otherwise known as "stay-at-home" orders, domestic violence rates have increased. There are numerous unknowns to this problem, including the reasons behind the increase in violence. Researchers (Hansen 2020; Kaukinen 2020; Piquero et al. 2020:601-635; Speed, Thomson, and Richardson 2020:1-36) have agreed there are multiple influences that can determine whether or not a household experiences domestic violence during these unprecedented times. My own research has also supported this idea that multiple factors will influence a household's risk of domestic violence during emergency situations as we see during the COVID-19 pandemic. When issues like unemployment, substance abuse, and isolation are introduced into one household, it exponentially increases the risk for domestic violence in homes that have never experienced it before - households with a history of it may face a risk of harsher or more frequent violence.

This research seeks to answer two questions: What factors contribute to the risk of domestic violence in a given household? Are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic harming

those at risk of domestic violence? Lastly, how are victims perceiving this violence during the pandemic?

Domestic violence is a very complex issue in normal circumstances. A global pandemic absolutely complicates the working understanding of domestic violence, as well as the factors that contribute to it and the reporting of domestic violence incidents. Due to the unpredictable nature of the pandemic and the little research into the relationship between natural disasters and domestic violence, scholars are struggling to bridge the gap to truly understand why and how domestic violence is dependent on the current status of the pandemic. While research into natural disasters, epidemics, and domestic violence has increased in the last few decades, there is a lot left to be explored. Further research attempting to understand the nuances between domestic violence and the pandemic is necessary in order to gain a better understanding for the dependent factors that can elevate the risk of domestic violence in a given household.

#### *Alcohol and Substance Use*

Alcohol and substance abuse are factors that can contribute to the elevation of risk of domestic violence in normal circumstances. Two studies (Fals-Stewart 2003:41-52; Friend 2011:619-633) agree that substance and alcohol abuse significantly elevates the risk of domestic violence in a given household. In this study, I address the same theory of substance abuse and violence in a household. Of course, the more often substance abuse occurs, the more often domestic violence has the possibility of occurring. This is because there is a large body of research indicating a relationship between substance use and domestic violence, with co-occurrence rates ranging between 25 to 80 percent (Friend 2011). Those with prior substance and/or alcohol abuse problems can increase their frequency of use while in lockdown during the pandemic, and thus increase the risk of domestic violence occurring in their home. In fact, a

national survey found that the overall frequency of alcohol consumption increased by 14 percent among adults over age 30, compared to the same time last year (Pollard 2020). Those that are experiencing isolation during the pandemic may turn to alcohol to either pass the time or as a form of de-stressing. This creates two possible problems, one of which is that those with no history of domestic violence can become more violent when drinking alcohol more frequently. This can create long-term substance or alcohol abuse problems for those who are using it more frequently while in isolation, and it can exacerbate substance dependency in those who were struggling with it previously. Both my own and previous research indicates that incidents of domestic violence will have a positive relationship with rates of substance and alcohol use among the population. This co-occurring factor warrants further exploration in research in order to better understand the possible long-term, negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Child Maltreatment*

Given that nuclear families are isolated in the same home they reside in, it is logical to understand that children will both experience and witness higher rates of domestic violence during the lockdown periods of the pandemic. In my study, respondents also address the problem of abuse from a parental figure or blood relative as a dependent. Although rates of domestic violence are much higher than official judicial statistics, the pandemic further suppresses the opportunity for victims to seek help - particularly in violence towards children. In fact, Hansen (2020) claims that although statistical child maltreatment rates have declined significantly during the pandemic, rates of violence are likely rising. This is because children are no longer attending in-person schooling, where educators are the most common reporters of child maltreatment to official agencies. Despite children attending online school, it is much harder for teachers to recognize the signs of domestic violence from a small computer browser window. Agencies like

Child Protective Services rely on community members and mandated reporters to recognize and report signs of child maltreatment, but when these children are shielded from the outside community the abuse oftentimes goes unnoticed. The same is true for children who witness domestic violence being perpetuated in their home between parents or towards other children in the family. When everyone is isolated in the same home and separated from their daily social contacts, violence can go undetected more effectively - hence the deceiving decline in rates of domestic violence against children.

### *Natural Disasters and Domestic Violence*

Natural disasters are defined as “a natural event... causes great damage or loss of life” (Oxford Languages 2020). For all intents and purposes, the COVID-19 pandemic is regarded as a natural disaster. Due to the extreme economic damage and loss of life it has created, research can conclude that consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are similar to other natural disasters like floods or earthquakes. Enarson (1999), a disaster sociologist, claims that domestic violence occurs at higher rates when helpful resources are unequipped to handle natural emergency preparedness. Naturally, the COVID-19 pandemic is an emergency that virtually no organization thought to prepare for beforehand given its unexpectedness. The economic strain the pandemic places on resources like shelters, hotlines, and counseling further restrain their ability to effectively assist victims of domestic violence at this time. On top of their limited financial reserves, resources are seeing an influx of demand because of the higher rates of domestic violence that is occurring. Another study points to the new barriers domestic violence victims face in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Speed (2020) emphasizes that her research found that nearly half of the responding domestic violence organizations have experienced a decrease in calls and reports during the pandemic. This decrease is because agencies that typically refer

their services to victims are temporarily closed, resulting in fewer referrals and thus fewer reports from victims to the organization, as the organization is widely unknown to those in need of the help. This pandemic has also resulted in family members assuming caregiver roles over their children and elderly relatives due to the shutdowns, resulting in little free time to access these resources outside of their daily obligations. Additionally, those experiencing domestic violence may be isolated in their homes and unable to leave due to the constant supervision and scrutinization by an abusive person, especially in the lockdown period of the pandemic. This study addresses the problem of isolation in the survey.

### *COVID-19*

Little statistical data has been generated to help bridge the knowledge gap between the possible correlation of domestic violence and the pandemic. The research conducted thus far will help contribute to the ever-growing body of understanding to explain the increase in domestic violence and its connection to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most outstanding empirical research on this problem is Piquero's work on domestic violence rates in Dallas, Texas in the wake of stay-at-home orders. Piquero et al.'s (2020) data analysis further supports the idea that domestic violence rates increased temporarily before and during these lockdown orders.

However, the author also claims that there does not appear to be a sustained higher rate of domestic violence when analyzing data for the 3 weeks following the stay-at-home orders. What Piquero fails to recognize is that many, many domestic violence incidences are unreported.

Enarson's work in "Violence Against Women In Disasters" focuses on the prevalence of intimate partner violence during natural disasters, which is violence between spouses or people in an intimate relationship. As Enarson (1999) points out in this research, "programs most hard hit [by the disaster] also reported rising service demand, including substantially increased crisis



work as long as 6 to 12 months after the event". The organizations that are seeing a sustained increase in domestic violence rates are not official government agencies like police and courts, but resources that provide temporary solutions and do not require an official report of the incident. Piquero focuses only on data that requires victims to call and report an incident of domestic violence, which is a rare occurrence given its dark shadow of crime. However, this is one of the basic challenges in domestic violence research - there is an understanding that this problem happens often, but is not brought to justice at the same rates that it occurs. As Kaukinen (2020) points out, "The low rates of police reporting and the challenges for scholars... will impact the ability to assess the connection between COVID-19 and intimate partner violence. This is a consequence of the under-reporting of these crimes to law enforcement agencies, the under-utilization of victim and social service agencies by victims, and the challenge of collecting self-report victimization data during the pandemic". There is a want and a need in the field to research this problem, but scholars are under time and resource constraints given the circumstances the COVID-19 pandemic has created. Also, the isolation the pandemic has created further restricts researchers' ability to interview domestic violence victims to better understand the problem we are facing.

In conclusion, all research cited is in agreement that domestic violence is a complex problem with a multitude of dependent outside influences. Putting a global pandemic on top of this already complex issue absolutely complicates the working understanding of the relationship between natural disasters, epidemics, and domestic violence. In normal circumstances, domestic violence rates are complicated because of its hidden nature and under-reporting. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates this problem because resources usually available are temporarily closed or reduced and official government agencies are overwhelmed with high demand in order to limit

the spread of the illness. While new research provides insight into the data available to understand current and future trends of domestic violence rates in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is largely difficult to make a definitive statement on the connection between the two due to the pandemic's fluidity and unpredictable nature. While research may disagree with the interpretation of data, they all come to the same conclusion in that domestic violence is largely unreported and thus difficult to explain, especially when a global pandemic is introduced.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Hypotheses*

1. As COVID-19 cases within the United States increase, the rates of domestic violence increase.
2. As COVID-19 cases within the United States increase, the rates of domestic violence decrease.
3. There is a positive relationship between the implementation of COVID-19 lockdown orders and the rates of domestic violence.

There are multiple influences at work that contribute to the rates of domestic violence and can contribute to the elevation of risk in a given household. However, the current pandemic has been viewed as a factor exacerbating the problem of domestic violence. This is because the preventive measures to reduce the risk of transmitting the COVID-19 (i.e. social distancing) has hindered domestic violence victims from being able to seek help and resources. Given this problem, there is a possible link between the cases of COVID-19 and the rates of domestic violence. As COVID-19 cases increase, states like Massachusetts have implemented lockdown orders so individuals do not have to leave their homes besides for necessities like groceries. These stay-at-home orders can also have a possible link to the rise of domestic violence rates, as

family members are all confined within one house for weeks to months. The independent variable for the first hypothesis is the cases of COVID-19 within the United States, and the dependent variable is the rates of domestic violence during that same time. Since the rate of domestic violence is being studied in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic we are trying to determine if it is dependent on the rate of cases at that time. Due to the extreme economic damage and loss of life it has created, research can conclude that consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are similar to other natural disasters like floods or earthquakes. The pandemic has restricted people's ability to leave their homes and conduct their normal everyday activities. Additionally, it can be easier for domestic violence to occur in a household that is experiencing an outbreak of the COVID-19. This is because the illness may create new caregiver responsibilities and provide a better opportunity for an abuser to restrict their victim's freedom. Another aspect of this problem is that a victim infected with the COVID-19 virus can be abused more often for being more "needy" or bringing it into the household. Survey Respondent 16 has experienced domestic violence from their mother multiple times. They said that an outbreak of COVID-19 within their household made them a target of abuse because they were the only one displaying symptoms, even though all family members tested positive for the virus. This abuse included being kicked in the chest because their mother was tired of hearing them cough as a result of the virus, and was "encouraged to hurry up and die". However, the respondent has never reported the abuse to law enforcement agencies out of fear that their siblings would be split up in the foster care system. As Speed (2020) points out, her research found that nearly half of the responding domestic violence organizations have experienced a decrease in calls and reports during the pandemic. The amount of COVID-19 cases may contribute to the increase of domestic violence and the heightened problem of underreporting.

As outlined above, it is very possible that the cases of COVID-19 itself is not necessarily the deciding factor that determines the rate of domestic violence at a given time. As we see from Respondent 16, the COVID-19 virus may just be a scapegoat to further perpetuate violence towards the victim. Domestic violence is a multifaceted issue in normal circumstances. A global pandemic absolutely complicates the working understanding of domestic violence, as well as the factors that contribute to it and the reporting of domestic violence incidents. The second hypothesis' independent variable is also the number of cases of COVID-19, and the dependent variable is the rates of domestic violence during that time. It is possible that the cases of COVID-19 are not causing the rates of domestic violence to fluctuate. It is also possible that domestic violence rates have remained the same, if not decreased during the pandemic, if we analyze the data currently available. Speed (2020) has emphasized that her research found that half of the organizations interviewed reported a decrease in calls and reports since the pandemic began. However, she attributes the decrease to a lack of available services that are usually open in normal circumstances. Agencies that typically refer their services to victims are temporarily closed, resulting in fewer referrals and thus fewer reports from victims to the organization, as the organization is widely unknown to those in need of the help. However, the statistical data has not determined whether or not those sentiments are true. Additionally, Hansen (2020) has found that child maltreatment statistics have also decreased during the pandemic. Again, Hansen attributes this decline to the temporary removal of in-person schooling, where 1 in 5 educators are responsible for reporting child maltreatment to official agencies. Online schooling presents a challenge for educators to recognize the signs of child maltreatment, as they are not face-to-face with the children. Lastly, Piquero et al.'s (2020) data analysis further supports the idea that domestic violence rates increased temporarily before and during these lockdown orders.

However, the author also claims that there does not appear to be a sustained higher rate of domestic violence when analyzing data for the 3 weeks following the stay-at-home orders. All the statistical analysis provided thus far has shown that domestic violence rates have for the most part decreased across the board. Three survey respondents had actually experienced a decrease in abuse when lockdowns began because they were separated from their abuser. However, 2 of these 3 respondents reported their abuser was a parent or guardian that they were separated from. There is not enough data available to determine if the same is true across the board, or in intimate relationships with domestic violence. While domestic violence is one of the most unreported crimes, data has been consistent that the rates have decreased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third hypothesis focuses on the relationship between the implementation of lockdown orders and the rates of domestic violence. The independent variable is the implementation of the stay-at-home orders and the dependent variable is once again the rates of domestic violence in the same time period. Most relevant research focusing on the pandemic's effects on domestic violence has mentioned the implementation of lockdown orders as a strong influence. Those who have experienced a history of domestic violence may be isolated in their homes and unable to leave due to the constant supervision and scrutinization by an abusive person, especially in the lockdown period of the pandemic. Seven of the 37 (18.9 percent) respondents who said they experienced domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic had also been victims of domestic violence from a different person or relationship in the past; about another third (32.4 percent) of respondents had experienced domestic violence both before and during the pandemic from the same person or relationship. Additionally, all the negative effects the pandemic has created on top of the lockdown orders can create a much higher risk for

domestic violence in a given household that is required to be confined together in a single home. Speed (2020) explains that domestic violence can increase during these stay-at-home periods because resources that are usually available are temporarily closed or reduced in order to limit the spread of the illness. Thus, victims are unable to access help from social services that would otherwise be available in normal circumstances. Additionally, Piquero et al.'s (2020) work mentions that the lockdown orders can create an overall negative effect within a household, as unemployment, financial strain, and new caregiver roles create compounding strains on a family. A household that was not originally at risk for domestic violence may now see an elevated risk because of the toxicity the consequential problems of the pandemic creates in a family confined together for weeks or months at a time.

### *Measures*

The conceptual definition of physical violence is “the threat of/action of forceful behavior, through hitting, kicking, or using another type of physical violence against a person”. The conceptual definition of sexual violence is “forced sexual acts, unwanted touching, rape, or any other forcible sexual actions”. The conceptual definition of verbal/emotional violence is “undermining another person’s feelings of self-worth through judging, coercion, shame or other manipulative actions”. The conceptual definition of financial abuse is “controlling a victim’s ability to acquire, use, and/or maintain financial resources”. The operational definition will be measured through the anonymous survey conducted by myself.

The conceptual definition of our independent variable, “cases of COVID-19” is as follows: those who have tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the outbreak starting on January 20, 2020. The operational definition will be measured through published data gathered from the CDC COVID Data Tracker, in order to determine the case statistics during a

specified amount of time. The test covers the full range of the problem being measured as it determines whether or not an individual has the illness.

The conceptual definition of the independent variable, “implementation of lockdown orders”, is as follows: the declaration of a state of emergency due to the threat of COVID-19 in a given state that requires citizens to stay at their place of residence except as needed and to shut down all non-essential businesses until further notice. The operational definition of this independent variable will be measured through the National Academy for State Health Policy’s chart outlining each state’s history of lockdown orders and current plan.

The conceptual definition of the dependent variable, “rate of domestic violence” is as follows: any act carried out with the intention of physically or emotionally harming another person related to you by blood, present or prior marriage, having a child in common, having a caregiver role or having/have had a dating relationship. The operational definition will be measured through various resources, including the New York City Police Department’s monthly domestic violence reports, the National Domestic Violence Hotline’s data, and The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). Reliability is an issue when measuring this variable. This is because domestic violence is one of the most unreported crimes, thus skewing data across the board. While one survey may indicate that 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence at some point in their lives, data focusing on formal reports of domestic violence may only find a fraction of that.

The data I will be collecting is qualitative, as I will be collecting information on whether or not individuals have experienced domestic violence during the pandemic and what contributed to it. The list of survey questions are in the Appendix.

*Research Design*

My research design is through an anonymous survey that is circulated throughout social media. Additional information will be collected through prior research surveys and publicly available datasets. The survey does not require IRB approval because it is completely anonymous and does not link back to a specific respondent in any way. It is administered online through Google Forms and then dispersed through an open link that is shared online. The publicly available datasets do not require IRB approval, as I will be examining data already collected from other organizations. The datasets I will be using include the NYPD's monthly domestic violence reports, the Domestic Violence hotline data, and Dallas domestic violence reports that Piquero (2020) bases his analysis from. These are publicly available, so I will access it through the use of the internet and their individual organization websites that publish them. Each of these datasets are from 2020, but all date back to before then. This research design will be most appropriate to measure my variables because it requires a broad range of information in order to better understand the entire issue of domestic violence and its reaction to the pandemic.

*Sampling*

The target population will be individuals over 18 years old within the United States that have experienced domestic violence during COVID-19. The sampling I will utilize for my survey is non-probability sampling, more specifically, snowball sampling. Since the survey has been circulated on social media, I have asked respondents and interested persons to share the surveys with their own network in order to gain more information. My personal network has been advantageous in collecting data for this research, as many of them have experienced domestic violence and thus will become a respondent for my survey. It is also appropriate for my study because I do not have the time, money, or resources to hand pick respondents to help me



complete the research. I have provided an incentive that for every share I received on the survey link, I would donate \$1 to a local domestic violence organization. Otherwise, there are no incentives to participate in the study.

## RESULTS

The following statements encompass the statistical and qualitative analysis of the anonymous survey that was conducted. The sample consisted of 103 respondents, all of whom were collected through snowball sampling. Additionally, 53 respondents indicated that they have never experienced domestic violence during their lifetimes or did not respond to the survey. This brings the total sample size to 37 respondents.

### *Demographics*

Of the 37 respondents, 36 (97.3 percent) were United States residents. One (2.7 percent) respondent did not respond to the question as to their country of residence. Those that are not from the United States were excluded from the sample results.

Thirty (81 percent) respondents were between the ages of 18-29, 3 (8.1 percent) respondents were between the ages of 30-39, and 3 (8.1 percent) respondents were 40+ years of age. One (2.7 percent) respondent did not include their age.

The next question asked for the respondent's race/ethnicity that best describes them. Three respondents chose two or more races/ethnicities, 31 (83.7 percent) respondents were White, 2 (5.4 percent) respondents were Hispanic/Latino, and 1 (2.7 percent) respondent did not choose their race/ethnicity.

The next question asked respondents whether or not they were a US citizen or permanent resident of the country. Thirty-six (97.3 percent) respondents selected "Yes", and 1 (2.7 percent) respondent did not answer as to their US citizenship.

Question 5 asks for the respondent's gender identity. The options are "Woman," "Man", "Non-Binary", "Transgender Woman", and "Transgender Man". There is also a blank space left for alternative options. More than half (56.7 percent) of the respondents selected "Woman", 3 (8.1 percent) selected "Man", 4 (10.8 percent) selected "Non-Binary", and 1 (2.7 percent) left the question unanswered.

Question 6 asks for the respondent's sexual orientation. The options are "Heterosexual/straight", "Gay/lesbian", "Bisexual", and "Asexual". There is also a blank space left for alternative options. More than half (59.5 percent) of the respondents selected "Heterosexual/straight", 2 (5.4 percent) respondents selected "Gay/lesbian", 11 (29.7 percent) respondents selected "Bisexual", and none selected "Asexual". Two (5.4 percent) respondents left their sexual orientation unanswered. It is important to note that nearly all sexuality groups defined in this survey had exactly a 50 percent split on whether or not they experienced domestic violence during the pandemic.

Violence During COVID-19?

		No	Yes	Total
Sexuality	Heterosexual/Straight	11	11	22
	Gay/Lesbian	1	1	2
	Bisexual	4	7	11
Total		16	19	35

### *Relationship Status*

Question 7 asks about the respondent's relationship status since COVID-19 began. Fifteen (40.5 percent) respondents indicated that they are in a steady or serious relationship. Almost one-fifth (18.9 percent) of the respondents indicated that they were in a marriage, civil

union, domestic partnership, or cohabitation. Six (16.2 percent) respondents said they were in a casual relationship or hook-up, and another fifth (21.6 percent) of respondents were not in a partnered relationship since COVID-19 began. One (2.7 percent) respondent did not answer this question.

Question 8 asks about the respondent's current marital status, with the options of "Never married, single", "Not married, but living with partner", and "Divorced or separated". Almost two-thirds (64.9 percent) of respondents indicated that they were never married and were single. Seven (18.9 percent) respondents were not married but living with their partner. No respondents were divorced/separated, and 6 (16.2 percent) respondents did not select their current marital status.

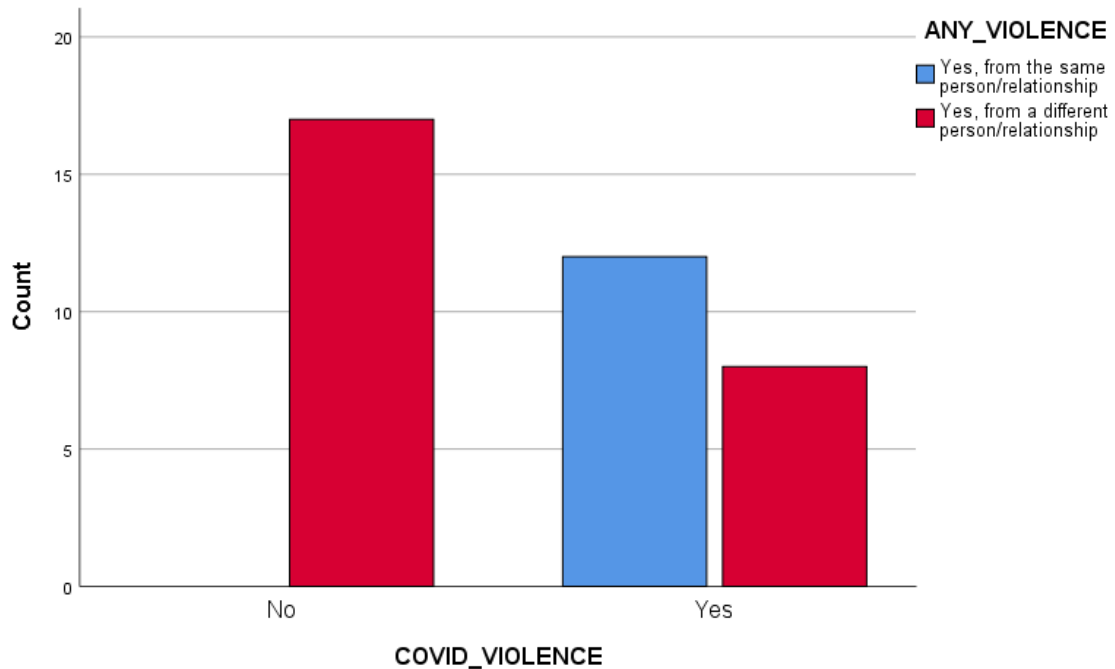
### *Experiences*

Question 9 asks whether or not the respondent has experienced domestic violence since COVID-19, and allows them to select multiple options. Two (5.4 percent) respondents indicated that they have experienced physical, sexual, and verbal/emotional violence. One (2.7 percent) respondent indicated they have experienced sexual, verbal/emotional, and financial violence. Three (8.1 percent) respondents indicated they have experienced physical and verbal/emotional violence. Two (5.4 percent) respondents have experienced sexual and verbal/emotional violence. One (2.7 percent) respondent has experienced only sexual violence. Eleven (29.7 percent) respondents have experienced verbal/emotional violence, and almost half (15.9 percent) of respondents selected that they have not experienced any domestic violence since COVID-19 began, but have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.

Question 10 relates to the perpetrator of domestic violence. Three (8.1 percent) respondents indicated that both their intimate partner and parent/guardian were perpetrators of

their experiences. One (2.7 percent) respondent's intimate partner and partner's ex girlfriend were perpetrators of domestic violence. Seven (18.9 percent) respondents experienced domestic violence from their intimate partner. Six (16.2 percent) respondents experienced domestic violence from their parent/guardian. One (2.7 percent) respondent experienced domestic violence from their sister and her boyfriend. One (2.7 percent) respondent experienced domestic violence from a mutual friend. One (2.7 percent) respondent experienced domestic violence from their ex boyfriend. One (2.7 percent) respondent experienced domestic violence from their sister and the sister's boyfriend. Sixteen (43.2 percent) respondents did not respond to this question.

Question 14 also asks respondents if they have ever experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. Over two-thirds (67.6 percent) of respondents indicated "Yes, from a different person/relationship", and the other third (32.4 percent) of respondents answered "Yes, from the same person/relationship". Not all respondents experienced domestic violence during COVID-19. Of the respondents that experienced domestic violence from a different person/relationship, 17 (45.9 percent) did not experience domestic violence during the pandemic. However, the other 8 (21.6 percent) respondents that experienced domestic violence from a different person/relationship also experienced abuse during the pandemic.



### Reporting

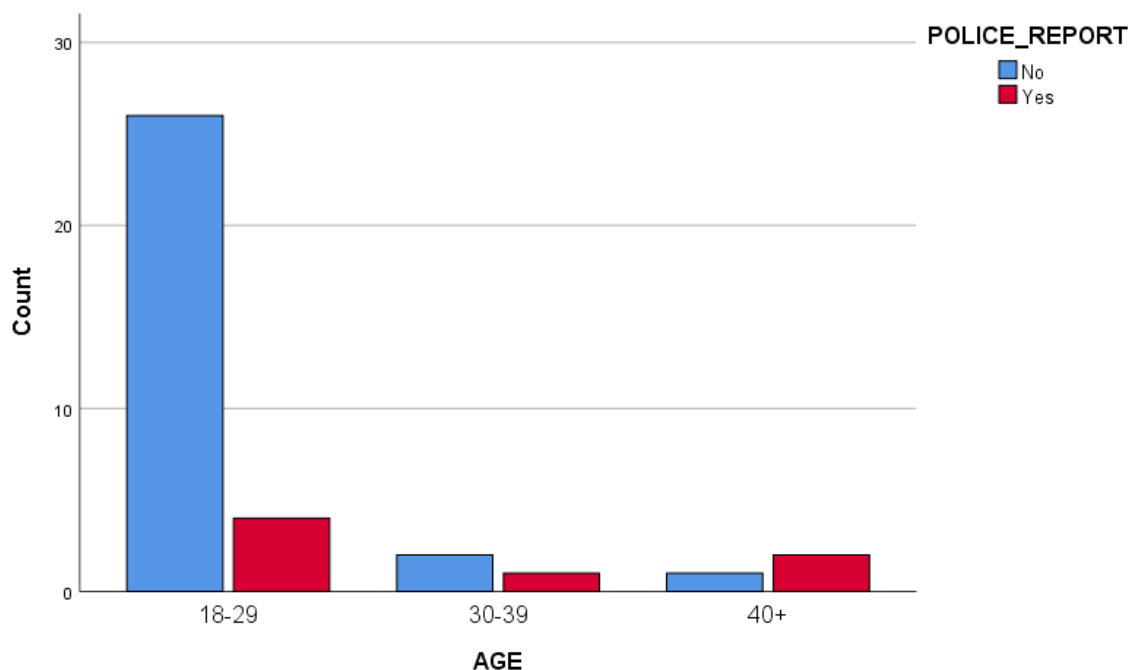
About half (48.6 percent) of the respondents said that they did not report their incident to the police. Two (5.4 percent) respondents said they did report their incident to the police. Seventeen (45.9 percent) respondents did not respond to Question 11 or selected “N/A”.

Question 12 asks whether the respondents reported the incident to other authorities. Three (8.1 percent) respondents indicated that they reported it to their doctor and a trusted friend or family member. Six (16.2 percent) respondents indicated that they reported it to only a trusted friend or family member. A majority (75.7 percent) of respondents did not answer the question, selected “No”, or “N/A”.

Question 13 asks the respondents if they have ever reported an incidence of domestic violence in their lifetime to any authorities. One (2.7 percent) respondent indicated they have reported an incidence to their social worker and a trusted friend or family member. Three (8.1 percent) respondents answered that they reported it to their doctor and a trusted friend or family member. About one-third (32.4 percent) of respondents answered they reported it to a trusted

friend or family member. Another third (35.1 percent) of respondents answered “No”, and 8 (21.6 percent) respondents did not answer the question.

Question 15 asks respondents if they have ever reported any domestic violence incidents to police. Twenty-nine (78.4 percent) respondents said “No”, 7 (18.9 percent) respondents indicated “Yes”, and 1 (2.7 percent) respondent indicated that someone else reported it for them. Overall, nearly all respondents have not reported any domestic violence incidents to the police. It is important to note, however, that 4 (15.4 percent) of those aged 18-29 reported, 1 (33.3 percent) aged 30-39 reported, and 2 (66.6 percent) of those respondents 40+ years old reported at some point.

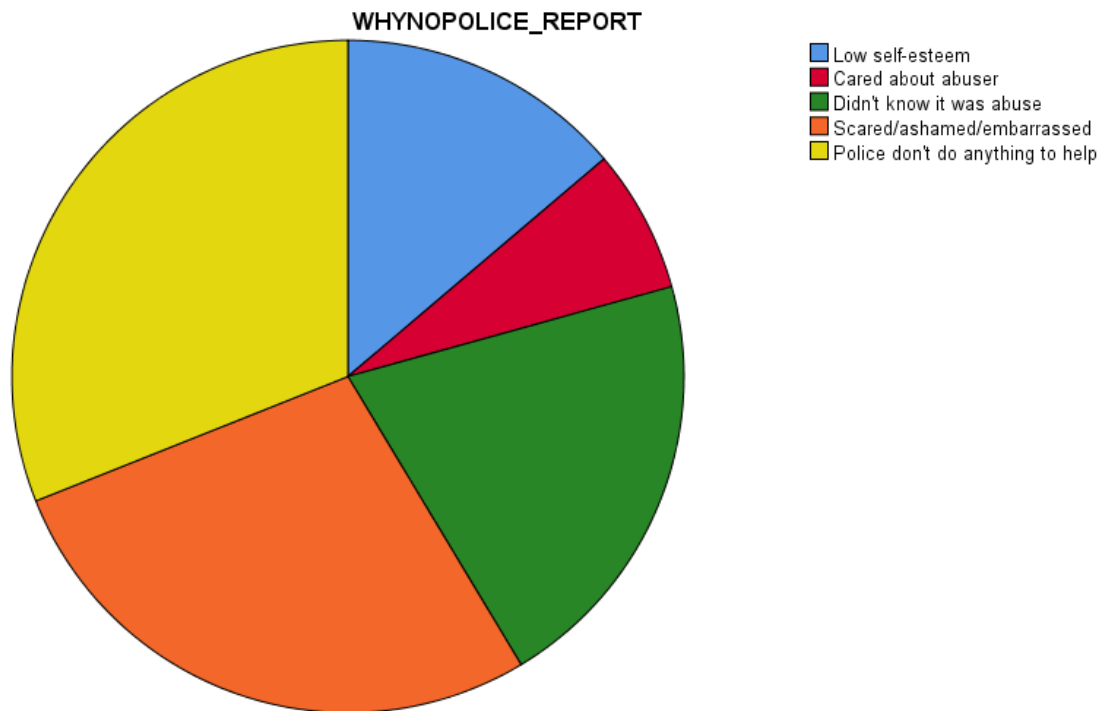


### COVID-19

Question 16 through 20 are open-ended questions, allowing respondents to write their subjective experiences on their history with domestic violence and COVID-19.

Question 16 asks those who selected “No” to the previous question why they decided not to report the incident to the police. Eight (21.6 percent) respondents did not answer. Two (5.4

percent) respondents indicated that they did not report out of caring feelings for the perpetrator. Five (13.5 percent) respondents indicated that they did not realize it was abuse until later on after the relationship was over. Almost a quarter (24.3 percent) of respondents explained that they were fearful of their abusers or the consequences surrounding reporting the incident. One (2.7 percent) of these 9 respondents indicated that they also had caring feelings for their abuser. Six (16.2 percent) respondents explained that they felt the police would not do anything to resolve the situation because of negative past experiences, lack of evidence, and lack of credibility. Five (13.5 percent) respondents explained that they felt helpless to report the situation because they relied on their abuser for a livelihood, had very low self-esteem, or didn't know how to report the abuse. Two (5.4 percent) respondents indicated that they did not report it to the police because they had resolved the situation themselves by leaving or blocking the other person from contacting them.



Question 17 asks for the respondents who have experienced domestic violence during COVID-19, if the violence was worse than before the pandemic began. Twenty (54 percent) respondents did not respond to this question or selected 'N/A'. Eleven (29.7 percent) respondents said "No". Five (13.5 percent) respondents said the abuse was worse, and 1 (2.7 percent) respondent replied with "It's never fun", which I will include in the "Yes" category.

Question 18 asks the respondents that have experienced violence in COVID-19 if the pandemic was used as a threat for their safety. Eighteen (48.6 percent) respondents did not answer this question. Fourteen (37.8 percent) respondents indicated "No" or "N/A". Two (5.4 percent) respondents said "Yes". Three (8.1 percent) respondents indicated that it wasn't used as a threat, but created a lot of arguments and was a source of stress in the relationship.

Question 19 asks how COVID-19 has affected the respondents' experiences with domestic violence. Over half (59.5 percent) of the respondents did not reply to this survey question. Six (16.2 percent) respondents indicated that it has not affected their experiences with domestic violence. One (2.7 percent) respondent indicated that they felt much more isolated because of the COVID lockdowns in conjunction with their sexual assault during the pandemic. One (2.7 percent) respondent explained that it made it much harder to access help. Two (5.4 percent) respondents said that being stuck at home more with their partner has created more arguments since they cannot leave the house. One (2.7 percent) respondent said that their parent physically and verbally abused them when they were sick with the COVID-19 virus. Surprisingly, 3 (8.1 percent) respondents indicated that the pandemic has made their domestic abuse better because they are separated from their abuser for the time being. One (2.7 percent) respondent said that people talking more about domestic violence has helped them in their own experiences during the pandemic.



Question 20 asks the respondents who have experienced domestic violence in COVID-19 if any other outside factors contributed to the domestic violence in their home. This includes things like job loss, financial problems, and drug/alcohol abuse. Seventeen (45.9 percent) respondents did not answer this question. Four (10.8 percent) respondents said “No” or “N/A”. Two (5.4 percent) respondents indicated that both mental health issues and alcohol abuse were factors in their domestic violence experiences. One (2.7 percent) respondent had an accident that affected their physical health. Five (13.5 percent) respondents said that alcohol and drug abuse was a factor in their domestic violence experiences. Two (5.4 percent) respondents said the mental health issues were a factor in their lives during the pandemic. Three (8.1 percent) respondents indicated that job loss and financial problems were one of the factors that affected their lives. Among those 3 respondents, they also indicate that mental health issues and addiction also affected their lives. One (2.7 percent) respondent said their partner’s ex girlfriend became more prevalent in their lives during the pandemic. Two (5.4 percent) respondents indicated that being isolated after getting sent home from work/school affected them, and 1 (2.7 percent) of those 2 respondents said substance abuse was also a factor.

### *Discussion & Conclusion*

This study sought to examine how the consequences of COVID-19 affected individuals’ experiences with domestic violence, both before and during the pandemic. It is important to note that this study was not designed to measure domestic violence rates but rather to hear how victims perceived their abuse experiences. While the number of people surveyed was small, and as a result the generalizability of these findings to the entire U.S. population is unknown, this project contributes to an emerging record of the experiences of domestic violence victims. If the respondent’s narratives could be summarized in a single observation, it would be that this group

experienced domestic violence regardless of whether or not the pandemic was occurring - however, the closures of resources contributed to the frequency and severity of their abuse.

In this study, I attempted to address the following questions: What factors contribute to the risk of domestic violence in a given household? Are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic harming those at risk of domestic violence? Lastly, how are victims perceiving this violence during the pandemic?

As a result of the data analysis, three main themes emerged: those that were previously victimized in the same relationship had a higher likelihood of future victimization during the pandemic; it was highly unlikely that those who experienced domestic violence both before and during the pandemic would report to the police; and both the distrust of law enforcement authority and feelings of shame, embarrassment, or fear are major obstacles in getting victims to report their experiences of abuse.

Analyzing the data in this study helped to expose our society's inability to support domestic violence victims during natural disasters and this can help shed light on how to better allocate resources for them during these times of crisis. Formal reporting data may show that domestic violence rates are decreasing. However, this does not mean that actual incidents of domestic violence have lessened. This is the result of limitations of resources during lockdown periods which prevent victims from receiving help. Also, victims of domestic violence may not have alone time in their own home now because of the restriction of movements that both the government and the abuser are enforcing. I believe my own survey research shows that incidents of domestic violence have stayed the same or even increased. While formal reporting has seen a decrease, domestic violence hotlines and other non-formal resources have recorded significant increases in domestic violence reports. With the closures of resources like domestic violence

organizations, shelters, or temporary housing to separate the abuser from the victim, law enforcement is one of the only other options victims are given to hopefully be removed from the situation. Unfortunately, a lack of trust with police due to past experiences and the victim's own negative thoughts and feelings on their experiences prevent this reporting from occurring. I hope that the results of this research pushes governments to enact better policy regarding the greater allocation of funds and resources for domestic violence awareness, prevention, and aid. Since domestic violence resources like women's shelters are difficult to find and become enrolled in during normal circumstances, governments have the responsibility to fund these organizations in order to temporarily expand their efforts in the wake of a natural disaster like COVID-19. Additionally, the government needs to implement an awareness and prevention program in order to spread the warning signs of abusive relationships, provide greater awareness for domestic violence hotlines, and keep resources open and functioning for continued use.

Many issues requiring further research arose from this study. Many of the respondents experiencing domestic violence from a parent or guardian expressed concern over their younger siblings and family members under 18. Respondent 16 expressed concern over their younger siblings if they reported the abuse, and instead faced physical abuse at the hands of their mother to shield them from the possibility of foster care. How children under 18 are affected by domestic violence at home, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic, remains largely unknown.

For future research, I would suggest an examination of previous victimization and victimization in the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted above, those who experienced domestic violence from a different person or relationship were much more likely to also experience domestic violence during the pandemic. How does this previous victimization impact their future

possibility of victimization? Is this a result of the factors surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, or something else?

Three respondents cited that the abuse actually got better or ceased during the pandemic because of their ability to separate themselves from their abusive household. Is this a common occurrence, or a rarity? How does separate lockdowns actually decrease the likelihood of abuse? Is this a temporary relief or a permanent escape from abuse? All of these questions and more are deserving of further research.

## LIMITATIONS

As discussed in the Sampling section of the research, the research survey I conducted has many limitations. Thus far, most respondents are those who personally know me or are a part of my larger social network of people. They are also people who had a desire to fill out the survey, as it is not required for anyone. All respondents are chosen out of convenience rather than hand selected for straightforward results. Because of this, the respondent pool is also much smaller than desirable. This can skew the results to be representative only of the small sample size I have taken rather than a representative sample of the country. The survey respondents are the most limiting aspect of the research survey because of the limited resources available for thorough research into such a complex issue.

Additionally, all questions on the survey are optional. This creates a problem for data collection, as some data may be incorrect or incomplete because of respondents that opted out of answering a certain question. For example, the survey intends to analyze United States residents and the first question asks the respondent's country of residence. One respondent did not select their country, which leaves room for ambiguity as to whether or not they should continue to be included in the data analysis. Nonetheless, since it is an anonymous survey there is no way to

determine whether or not this is the case. Additionally, the survey did not state what respondents I was looking for - those being U.S. citizens over 18. This generated a large amount of invalid responses that had to be discarded. Those who did not respond to the survey questions asking about country of residence and age could possibly not fit this description, making room for error in the results.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented and challenging disaster for everyone in the world, the reactions to it remain largely mixed. Even within the United States, the response to the pandemic varies widely throughout the country. Thus, I could not include non-U.S. citizens that responded to my survey. Given the massive differences in COVID-19 response between the U.S. and countries like New Zealand and Australia, respondents' experiences would be so different that it could be very difficult to make any determinations on domestic violence.

The survey did not specify if the respondent experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives, but not during the pandemic. Since the survey did not ask respondents to clarify this issue, some respondents answered further questions about reporting and other issues meant for just those who experienced domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This can affect conclusions made about respondents' experiences just during the pandemic.

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Appendix. Domestic Violence in COVID-19 Survey Questions.

1. What country are you currently located?
  - a. United States
  - b. Canada
  - c. Option for other
2. How old are you?
  - a. Younger than 18
  - b. 18-29
  - c. 30-39
  - d. 40+
3. Select the race/ethnicity that best describes you.
  - a. White



- b. Asian
  - c. Black/African American
  - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - e. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - f. Hispanic/Latino
  - g. Option for other
4. Are you a US Citizen or Permanent Resident?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
5. Which best describes your gender identity?
- a. Woman
  - b. Man
  - c. Transgender woman
  - d. Transgender man
  - e. Non-Binary
  - f. Option for other
6. Do you consider yourself to be:
- a. Heterosexual/straight
  - b. Gay/lesbian
  - c. Bisexual
  - d. Asexual
  - e. Option for other
7. Since COVID-19, have you been in a partnered relationship?

- a. Yes, casual relationship or hook-up
  - b. Yes, steady or serious relationship
  - c. Yes, marriage, civil union, domestic partnership or cohabitation
  - d. No
8. Are you currently:
- a. Never married, single
  - b. Not married, but living with partner
  - c. Divorced or separated
9. Since COVID-19 began, have you experienced domestic violence?
- a. Yes, physical violence
  - b. Yes, sexual violence
  - c. Yes, verbal/emotional violence
  - d. Yes, financial violence
  - e. No
10. If you selected yes to question 9, who was the perpetrator of the violence?
- a. Intimate partner
  - b. Parent/guardian
  - c. Caregiver
  - d. Option for other
11. If you selected yes to question 9, did you report this incident to the police?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Option for other

12. Did you report the domestic violence to other authorities?

- a. Yes, a domestic violence hotline
- b. Yes, my local domestic violence organization
- c. Yes, my social worker
- d. Yes, my doctor
- e. Yes, a trusted friend or family member
- f. No
- g. Option for other

13. Have you ever reported an incidence of domestic violence to any of the following authorities?

- a. Yes, a domestic violence hotline
- b. Yes, my local domestic violence organization
- c. Yes, my social worker
- d. Yes, my doctor
- e. Yes, a trusted friend or family member
- f. No
- g. Option for other

14. Before COVID-19, did you experience domestic violence?

- a. Yes, from a different person/relationship
- b. Yes, from the same person/relationship
- c. No

15. Have you ever reported any incidents of domestic violence to police?

- a. Yes

- b. No
  - c. Option for other
16. If selected no to question 15, why did you decide not to report the incident(s)?
17. If you have experienced domestic violence during COVID-19, was the violence worse than usual?
18. If you experienced domestic violence during COVID-19, was the pandemic used as a threat?
19. Please explain how COVID-19 has affected your experiences with domestic violence. Be as general or specific as you want.
20. Did any other outside factors contribute to the domestic violence in your home? This can be job loss, financial problems, drug/alcohol abuse, etc. Be as general or as specific as you want.